

The Builder.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1852.



THE question of the expediency or otherwise of removing the NATIONAL GALLERY from Trafalgar-square is exciting considerable interest, and we return to the discussion of the subject at the Institute of British Architects, which was resumed on the 29th of November. Professor Donaldson, who was in the chair, in re-opening the discussion, observed that it might be regarded as the pursuit of a National Gallery under difficulties. In the first place, he believed the Government had actually purchased a new site. The question was, is the atmosphere of London injurious to the pictures? The mere improvement of the present building externally would be costly; and there was a further question, whether the vicinity of the present site would admit of a sufficient enlargement of the building. For himself, he thought the difficulty and expense of properly ventilating the existing building was a great objection to it. It had been said that the public would not go so far as Kensington to see the collection, but he believed few men of business, and still fewer artisans, went now to the National Gallery, without devoting half a day to the purpose; and that if they could do so in pure air, and among trees and gardens, it would be a greater inducement to them. He therefore preferred the site suggested by the Government. With regard to the space required, he thought a National Gallery should embrace not only pictures, but the sketches and drawings of ancient and modern painters, together with illustrations of pottery, porcelain, and metal work; casts of public monuments and antiquities; and for that purpose courtyards would be required, and a much greater space than Mr. Smith's plan provided. He further objected to that gentleman's project, that it ought to have embraced a complete architectural elevation in each front. Such a design should be conceived largely and magnificently, and the houses in St. Martin's-place and the access to Duke's-court should not be allowed to interfere with it.

Mr. Papworth considered that an additional building to the westward, corresponding with that proposed by Mr. Smith to the east, with the removal of the Royal Academy, would provide for a collection as extensive as that at Munich,—the largest on the continent. Sculpture should be an essential portion of a National Gallery; and the noble squares in the vicinity of the British Museum afforded ample space for adding picture-galleries to the sculpture there displayed. Mr. Papworth particularly called the attention of the meeting to the evidence of Sir C. Eastlake, Mr. Uwins, and Mr. Faraday, to the effect that the removal of the pictures to the suburbs would reduce the number of visitors; and read some passages, from which he inferred that they recommended the removal on that ground. If the public were to see the pictures, they must be in a central situation; otherwise they might, with great propriety, be taken through the provinces for the benefit of their health, and for the instruction of the inhabitants of the large towns

of the kingdom. As no new site could be purchased without the assent of Parliament, he thought there was time for the Institute to interpose.

Mr. Pocock agreed with the chairman that few casual passers entered the National Gallery. The crowds at the Crystal Palace last year, and at the recent lying in state at Chelsea, proved that the distance was not an objection where the attraction was sufficient. The artisan would seek fresh air when he took a holiday; and a new site would subject the carriages of a different class of visitors to less risk of injury than the present. He did not consider the project to remove the National Gallery to Brompton as a "job," but rather as a move in the right direction; and it ought not to be thwarted by any illiberal or unhandsome observation. Many artists, connoisseurs, and scientific men resided in that locality; and considering a clear atmosphere most desirable for the preservation of the pictures, he hoped the plan proposed by the Government would be carried out.

Mr. Foggo asserted that the real object of the proposed removal was to diminish the number of visitors. If, therefore, as Mr. Pocock had argued, their number would be increased by such removal, that was a good reason for retaining the present site. Mr. Uwins, Mr. Ety, and others had stated that, till within the last four years, the pictures were in the best possible condition; and Sir C. Eastlake and Mr. Seguer had admitted that, with some alterations proposed by Sir C. Barry, they would not object to the present building. Together with the chairman, Mr. Hume, Mr. Godwin, and others, he (Mr. Foggo) had used zealous and effectual exertions to throw open the public buildings of the country to all classes; and as there was now an opportunity of enlarging and improving the National Gallery, the only substantial question was the safety and preservation of the pictures. It was on the latter point only that the Parliamentary Committee proposed a change of site; but that report was based on insufficient evidence: it excluded the results of Mr. Faraday's unfinished experiments, and also the evidence the committee had sought as to foreign galleries. Everything, in fact, had been done to make out a case of injury to the pictures. In three months 120,000 persons visited the Royal Academy, whilst 700,000 went to the National Gallery in ten months and a-half. The visitors to the latter were not in the rooms more than an hour each on an average, whilst those who went to the Royal Academy stayed at least three hours. The Academy was notoriously the most crowded, and the injury by exhalation from the crowd was therefore greater than in the National Gallery. If the national collection ought to be removed from London, it would be incumbent on the City Companies, the Society of Arts, the Dukes of Northumberland and Buccleugh, Lord Grosvenor, and Sir R. Peel, to remove their collections also. It was intended to decorate the Houses of Parliament with pictures and statues, and surely a locality subjected to the malaria of Milbank and Lambeth was far inferior to that of Trafalgar-square. Mr. Farrar had ascribed the injury to the pictures to some workshops in the rear, rather than to the smoky chimneys; but those workshops were adjacent to Wardour-street, where Mr. Farrar kept some of the choicest works of the old

masters. The situation of Greenwich Hospital, from its dampness, was much inferior to that of the National Gallery; and, on the question of facility of access, it had been proved that neither there, at Dulwich, or at Hampton Court, were the visitors at all so numerous as at the present National Gallery. Mr. Foggo adverted to the serious complaints made by the authorities of St. George's Hospital as to the effluvia from the Serpentine, and contended that the site proposed by the Government would be open to the same objection.

Mr. Varley said that, as a chemist and an artist, he was convinced that London was the driest spot in England, and that there was far more fog and moisture out of the metropolis than in it. Though perhaps a little too near the Thames, a better spot than the present for the National Gallery could scarcely be found. He strongly urged the importance of educating the very humblest classes of the community in art, by giving them the utmost facility of access to the collection; and believed that for every mile which the pictures were taken from the heart of London, the number of visitors would diminish in an immensely increased proportion. The present site was most convenient for students, and the neighbourhood afforded ample space for enlargement. Mr. Varley entered into some particulars of his own practice in preserving pictures, in order to shew that the supposed causes of injury might be effectually counteracted.

Mr. Knowles, considering that the Government project should neither be supported nor condemned till it was fully known, moved the following resolution (which was afterwards seconded):—"That this discussion do stand adjourned, until the intentions of her Majesty's Government have been communicated to the public."

Mr. Fergusson, having measured the present site and the adjoining buildings, informed the meeting that, by including the workhouses, the barracks, and some inferior tenements behind, space might be provided for as many pictures as are now in the Louvre, for four times the sculpture now in the British Museum, together with a large gallery for prints, and a library; in fact, for seven times the present contents of the National Gallery and the British Museum. Regarding experience as better than reasoning on the question of injury from the atmosphere, he observed that the Marquis of Westminster and other noblemen possessed pictures which had been kept in London since the time of Charles I. and which were in at least as good condition as those in their country houses. As to the locality, the manager of any exhibition would infinitely prefer Regent-street or Charing-cross to Kensington.

Mr. Seddon spoke in favour of the enlargement of the present site, suggesting a quadrangular structure of adequate importance.

Mr. Tarring stated that he had consulted Mr. Woodburn, the well-known connoisseur, who, from his long experience, believed that the locality of St. Martin's-lane, where his own gallery is situated, was by no means injurious to pictures; and that the damage has, in fact, been caused by injudicious cleaning. Mr. Tarring thought it desirable that some opinion should be clearly expressed by the meeting, and therefore moved, as an